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ABSTRACT

This discussion concerns the advantages and disadvantages of using family day care, the most widely used form of day care in the United States. Advantages are that family day care providers generally: (1) accept younger infants than do centers; (2) are often conveniently located; (3) often have flexible hours; (4) provide home-like environments; (5) communicate directly with parents; (6) provide excellent learning environments; (7) provide greater individuality of care than do centers; and (8) are usually cheaper than centers. In regulated centers, providers and children benefit from the Child Care Food Program. Disadvantages are: (1) It is difficult to find high quality family day care; (2) Family day care providers usually have less training in child development than those in centers; (3) High child-staff ratios are a problem in some areas; (4) There is a high turnover rate; and (5) Zoning problems are prevalent. Several ways of overcoming the disadvantages and improving the quality of family day care are discussed. The Accreditation of the National Association for Family Day Care was developed to provide a means for examining the provider's care in terms of indoor safety, health, nutrition, interaction with children, indoor and outdoor play environments, and professional responsibility. Family day care associations that provide training and support for providers are discussed. A list of six references is appended. (GLR)

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WHO SHOULD CARE FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS?

A Family Day Care Perspective

Prepared for

Annual Conference

National Association for the Education of Young Children

Anaheim, California

By

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November, 1988

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WHO SHOULD CARE FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS?
A Family Day Care Perspective

Family day care is the most widely used form of day care in this country. There are approximately 195,000 regulated family day care homes in 50 states and the District of Columbia and possibly 5 times as many unregulated homes. A 1988 Licensing Study done by The Children's Foundation which gathered this information also determined that 80-85% of all infant care was in family day care homes.

In the publication entitled "Crisis in Infant and Toddler Child Care" published by the Ad Hoc Day Care Coalition, in 1985, they said, "There was a 95% increase in mothers of infants in the workforce from 1970 to 1984 and the projection for the year 2000 is that 4 out of 5 American infants under age one will have a mother in the workforce."

Resource and referral agencies (R&Rs) indicate that more than 75% of their calls are for individuals looking for infant placements. Women are calling to find day care arrangements as soon as they learn they are pregnant. At a provider near me, two of her parents planned their pregnancies to coincide with her openings so they would not have to look for alternative arrangements when the time came. Family day care agencies have long waiting lists for placements of infants, even when there is little or no waiting list for older children.

Because family day care is the most used form of day care for infants, I would like to spend some time discussing the advantages and disadvantages of using family day care.

First, let's look at the advantages:

1. Family day care providers accept infants at 5-6 weeks of age where centers will generally not take them until they are at least 3 months of age, IF at all. Since women often have very short maternity leaves or may be single parents where continued income is essential, this is paramount.

2. Family day care homes are generally located in the neighborhood where the parent lives making it extremely convenient.

3. Family day care providers generally have much more flexible hours than centers, trying to accommodate the varied needs of a working parent. They may open at 6 AM and may not close till after 6 PM; or they may provide evening care, weekend care or overnight care.

4. Family day care providers will usually accept 2 or more from the same family thus providing continuity for the parent and the infant. Family separation can cause additional stress to the parent and children.

5. Continuity of the caregiver. In a family day care setting the parent knows the individual caring for their child all day and knows it is the same person. This is important for the security of the infant and the bonding of the child to the parent and caregiver. In caring for infants, this is particularly important for the security of the infant and the bonding of the child to the parent and caregiver. In caring for infants, this is particularly important because they are totally dependent upon the caregiver.

6. In family day care there can be conformity of care from infancy through school age. Many family day care providers keep infants from a few weeks of age until the child is in school. This is again a benefit to the stability of the environment of the child and his family.

7. Children in family day care homes develop that home as their "home away from home," and the caregiver becomes a friend of the family, someone who can be counted on to help that child. It is a bond that stays with the child for many years.

8. Family day care offers a home-like setting, a setting similar to the one the child would be in if Mom didn't have to go out to work. This again is particularly important for the nurturing and development of infants and toddlers. Infants and toddlers are more vulnerable to adversity and less able to cope with discomfort and stress. Providing an environment for day care as much like their own home as possible is essential.

9. Also, because a family day care home usually has a multi-age grouping of children from infants to school age, the day care children become like siblings and interact as such. Infants and toddlers have the opportunity for an extended family environment with older brothers and sisters. Children learn so much from one another.

10. Experts agree that infants, especially, need to be cared for in small group settings. The emphasis for their normal growth and development is nurturing, love and TLC. A family day care home can provide this more readily than a center.

11. Because an infant in a family day care home has only one caregiver, it is easier for the parent to keep daily direct communications with regard to the growth and development of the infant. Parent - provider communication is essential since the changes in infants and toddlers happen so quickly and frequently. In a center due to staff changes, an infant or toddler may have three or more caregivers during one day. Centers usually have at least three shifts of staff which make it much harder for the parent to really keep track of the day to day activities of the child.

12. A family day care home is an excellent learning environment. Children learn more in the first six years of their life than in all the rest. Infants and toddlers need to have an opportunity to learn and grow, and a family day care home is a wonderful place to do just that.

13. Family day care provides greater individuality of care which enhances the child's feeling of self-worth. The care becomes personalized. The family day care provider feels almost as close to the day care children as she does her own.

14. A home is a less threatening place to an infant or toddler than a more impersonal center--a building. It is a loving, friendly, healthy learning and growing environment. It is a more nurturing and understanding environment for a slightly ill child, also. They may not feel quite so bad about not having Mommy or their own comfortable bed.

15. Family day care is generally cheaper than center-based care for infants and toddlers. Parents pay $100-$175 per week for infant care in a center and at this price the center may not be making a profit. In contrast, care in a family day care home will generally be $50-$150 a week depending upon geographic location. The overhead costs of caring for infants and toddlers in a center force the fees to skyrocket; things like child-staff ratios, staff salaries and benefits, insurance, building rental and maintenance, equipment, etc. Family day care providers on the other hand have much lower overhead costs and have the advantage of tax write-offs on a portion of the cost of household expenses like rent, gas, electric, oil, water, food as well as general business expenses.

16. The Child Care Food Program is another asset of the family day care provider. In a regulated home, providers and children benefit from this program. Providers receive reimbursement money for nutritious meals and snacks served and also receive training and monitoring. For infants and toddlers this means higher quality care and a more nutritious diet.

Unfortunately, there are some <u>disadvantages</u> of caring for infants and toddlers in a family day care setting. They are:

1. Finding quality family day care is still a difficult job. It is a less public form of day care with less outside supervision and accountability.

2. The physical learning environment may not offer as much

variety as a day care center, due to lack of training of the caregiver.

3. Family day care providers have less training in child development usually, and not as many training opportunities are available for them. In many states training is optional or non-existent. Only a very few states require any basic training for family day care providers, let alone on-going training.

4. Looser child-staff ratios are still a problem in a few places. Although the recommended ratio is one caregiver for two children under 12 months; or one caregiver for three children under the age of two and no more than four children under the age of three for one caregiver; some states still have significantly higher ratios such as Georgia where it is one to eight or Idaho where it is one to ten with no added breakdown for infants and toddlers.

5. The turnover rate in family day care is still a major problem. Because of isolation and lack of training, the turnover rate in family day care may be as high as 50%. Center turnover rate is not much better, due to the low staff salaries and few or no benefits. Studies have shown that the retention rate for family day care providers can be lengthened by providing training and support groups. Providers, who get involved in local, state or national family day care associations and who participate in training, find family day care a much more rewarding career and tend to stay in the profession much longer.

6. Zoning problems still continue to plague the family day care profession. Many providers choose to stay unregulated or underground for fear of being identified and shut down by their local city or township for a zoning violation. In many places operating a family day care business in your home is against residential zoning codes. In some states, state legislatures have enacted legislation which allows state family day care regulations to supercede local zoning codes. However, this is still the exception rather than the rule. An additional problem exists where condominium associations ban family day care or any other home occupation.

It is because of some of these disadvantages that The Children's Foundation wrote and published Better Baby Care: A Book for Family Day Care Providers in 1986. Helping parents and providers be more qualified to care for infants and toddlers was of primary concern to them. Now, they have just published Better Baby Care: A Training Course for Family Day Care Providers which is a step-by-step curriculum to accompany the Better Baby Care Book.

I can tell you from first hand experience as a trainer, having field tested this training curriculum three times, that it is an excellent tool and is very well received by participants and trainers alike. I say "participants" rather than family day care providers because, although the focus is for training family day care providers, we found day care centers just as interested

in having their staff participate. Quality infant-toddler training is so hard to find that center staff as well as family day care providers wanted to participate in the training. Not only that, but we continually had a waiting list of class participants. Incidentally, there was a fee for taking the course. It was not free or underwritten by anyone.

Training is an essential key to providing quality infant-toddler care in family day care. Our experience indicates that providers are willing to pay for their training if the opportunity is presented to them to take the training.

Another of the disadvantages of family day care as I stated previously, is finding a quality home. This was one of the factors instrumental in the development of the Family Day Care Accreditation of the National Association for Family Day Care (NAFDC). Family day care has always had an image problem. However, quality family day care has an even bigger one. NAFDC, at the urging of its members, and with their input, developed the Family Day Care Accreditation. The Accreditation's Assessment Profile of almost 200 questions in seven areas was developed for NAFDC by Drs. Annette Sibley and Martha Abbott-Shim of Georgia, working directly with family day care providers from all across the country.

The Accreditation covers indoor safety, health, nutrition, interacting, indoor and outdoor play environments and professional responsibility. It looks at the provider and her home.

Insurance companies and parents have already indicated the

benefits that this will provide in finding and enhancing quality family day care, especially for infants and toddlers.

Family day care associations are popping up everywhere. The growth of associations in the last five years has been tremendous. Just this past summer, The Children's Foundation and the National Association for Family Day Care updated their joint publication, Directory of Associations and Support Groups. This Directory now has over 425 groups listed as needs to be updated monthly to keep up with new additions. When the Directory was first developed by The Children's Foundation in 1984 there were 95 entries.

These associations are there to help alleviate the isolationism that providers feel, to provide training or support training that other such as R&Rs may be doing; to provide a forum for peer support and action. All these things are essential to the improvement of quality infant-toddler care in family day care settings. Helping to cut down the turnover rate surely provides more stability and continuity in the lives of infants and toddlers.

Associations are also reaching out to the unregulated providers by showing them the benefits of being regulated such as the income tax advantages, the child care food program, training and group purchasing. Many of the unregulated providers don't know what advantages they are missing. This important role of the association again helps make the quality family day care provider more readily available and more easily found.

Family day care is world wide. It is one of the oldest professions in the world. It can be found in France, Denmark, Israel, Norway, England, Australia, Ireland, Scotland, Germany, New Zealand, Canada and India to name a few. Each country may have its own name for it -- such as childminders in England -- but it is a recognized world wide child care profession. For infants and toddlers, it is going to continue to be the most widely used form of child care. As I have pointed out, there are many more advantages than disadvantages. However, the disadvantages are big in nature, but not insurmountable.

What is important for infants and toddlers from a family day care perspective as we enter the 1990's is what we do to make family day care higher in quality and more identifiable for parents. Family day care is going to continue to be the most widely used form of care for infants and toddlers. Today I think I have provided some insight into areas where disadvantages can be overcome--through education of the public and unregulated providers, through more training opportunities, through associations, through the NAFDC Accreditation and through better minimum regulatory standards. Who should care for infants and toddlers? I believe the answer to that is family day care. It is an overwhelming preference of parents and nothing leads me to believe that is going to change.

I'd like to quote from a letter from a parent in Pennsylvania which was in response to a local zoning issue for her child's family day care provider.

"As mothers today are forced into the workplace out of necessity--not out of choice--finding quality day care that provides a loving atmosphere is not an easy task. As a mother that was confronted with the reality of leaving my six-month infant in someone else's care, I found that the best alternative was a family day care home. The home environment provides a stable, loving atmosphere versus a "cold" center facility which has frequent staff turnovers. To find a state licensed day care home is not easy. Long waiting lists are frequently encountered. I have been very fortunate to find a provider that gives my child individualized loving attention in a home environment.

I wish for the day that I could stay home and have to endure "screaming, crying children" all day. We are not talking about providing care for juvenile delinquents--these children are between the ages of 6 weeks and 4 years old. I hardly believe that listening to the cries and laughter of these children could be so terrible that one could not endure it!"

Family day care provides an environment which fosters physical, social, emotional and cognitive development as well as providing an opportunity to form affectionate attachments with children and caregiver. It provides the opportunity to appreciate and care for each infant and toddler as an individual. As the National Association for Family Day Care Code of Excellence states: A quality family day care provider:

Provides a safe and healthy environment for children;

Responds to the need to offer age appropriate activities based on a knowledge of child development;

Offers nutritious meals in a positive, relaxed social atmosphere;

Varies play and encourages exploration in both outdoor and indoor space;

Interacts with children in a positive manner that is responsive to individual needs, enhances children's self confidence and facilitates learning;

Develops the family day care business by establishing policies and maintaining records and sharing information with parents;

Experiences professional growth opportunities through participation in seminars, conferences, support groups and professional associations; and

Respects and follows state and local family day care regulations.

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